DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 459 662 HE 034 554

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TITLE	The Future of Developmental Education.
PUB DATE	2001-00-00
NOTE	7p.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; College Preparation; *Developmental Studies Programs; *Educational Trends; Futures (of Society); *High Risk Students; Higher Education; Remedial Programs; Skill Development

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses current issues and trends in developmental education. The biggest trend is expected to be the concurrent development of learning strategies while students are enrolled in graduation-credit content courses. Separate developmental education courses will be mainstreamed into the traditional college course work in a variety of ways, just as there are a variety of ways to embed study strategies into course content. At present, the predominant approach today is based on a medical model of diagnosing students and then prescriptively placing them in separate developmental education courses or mandated activities, but there are trends forming nationwide to eliminate developmental education from public four-year institutions. Part of this effort is based on the belief that developmental education courses help water down the academic standards of all courses on campus. In fact, developmental education programs permit professors to maintain high academic standards, since students can develop the requisite skills in a separate developmental course or an adjunct academic support activity. It is not correct to think that raising admission standards would eliminate the need for developmental education, nor is it correct to think that developmental students need not be a high priority for colleges. Nor can developmental education be left to the community colleges. The nontraditional student of 5 to 10 years ago is the traditional student today, and these students did not move or commute to attend a two-year college exclusively. An ideal academic support program could be developed to focus on learning and academic enrichment for all students. (SLD)

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The Future of Developmental Education

David Arendale

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The Future of Developmental Education: David Arendale

1. What trends, directions do you see in developmental education in the 21st century?

The biggest trend will be the concurrent development of learning strategies while students are enrolled in graduation-credit content courses. Separate developmental education courses will be "mainstreamed" into the traditional college course work. This will be done in a variety of fashions: embedded instruction within content courses; paired courses; learning communities; and adjunct supplemental activities such as Supplemental Instruction.

In "Ten recommendations from research for teaching high-risk college students," Stahl, Simpson and Hayes said, "Students need to learn more than how to develop and when to employ the [learning] strategies, however. They also need to learn how to transfer specific strategies to the particular academic literacy demands of each course. Indeed, without effective training for transfer, college reading and learning courses face the very real danger of standing in isolation from the academic disciplines and of remaining mired in the deficit model. Strategy transfer occurs more naturally when students have a chance to practice the newly learned strategies on their own texts and with tasks perceived to be 'real'." In 1993 Kerr wrote about the difference between 'detached' and 'embedded' programs in the teaching of study skills or strategies. The more traditional approach of 'detached' programs involves the presentation of study techniques in isolation. In contrast, 'embedded' programs present learning and study strategies within the context of specific content and are more likely to result in regular use.

There are a variety of ways to embed study strategies. More than a few of those in the audience today use the Supplemental Instruction program for these very reasons. There are other models where the developmental courses are paired with content courses so that "real world" homework assignments are brought into the study strategies course. Some institutions are experimenting with fusing together content courses along with study strategy courses to provide a seamless integration of what to know with how to learn it. In any case, we must move beyond isolated standalone study strategy courses. Not only does research question their long-term effectiveness, changes in the political environment will probably not permit their continued existence at many campuses.

2. How are these trends different from developmental education services today?

The predominant trend is based on a medical model of diagnosing students and then prescriptively placing them into separate developmental education courses or mandated activities. About three-quarters of higher education institutions that enrolled freshmen offered at least one developmental reading, writing, or mathematics course in Fall 1995.

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All public two-year institutions and 81 percent of public four-year institutions offered developmental courses. The percent drops to 63 percent of private two-year and private four-year institutions. The lower the mean SES of student body and the more open the admissions standards of the institution, the higher the percent of institutions of a specific type offering developmental courses. Twenty-nine percent of first-time freshmen enrolled in at least one developmental reading, writing, or mathematics course in Fall 1995. Of the 2,128,000 first-time freshmen, 445,220 freshmen enroll in one or more developmental courses. This does **NOT** include: sophomores, juniors, seniors or graduate students who enroll in developmental courses; students who participate in non-credit academic enrichment activities such as tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, learning strategy workshops, or similar activities; students of any classification who enroll in developmental courses in science and other content areas not covered by the survey; and students of any classification who enroll in study strategy courses. About half of institutions offering developmental courses indicated that the number of students enrolled in developmental courses at their institution had stayed about the same in the last five years, 39 percent said enrollments had increased, and 14 percent said they had decreased.

There are significant trends forming nationwide to eliminate developmental education from public four-year institutions. Examples of this are already occurring in New York and South Carolina.

3. What do you think about removing developmental education from 4-year colleges and universities?

Part of this effort is based on the false belief that developmental education courses help to water down the academic standards of all courses on campus, especially the "senior" level institutions. Dr. Hunter Boylan from the National Center for Developmental Education stated, "Those who work in developmental programs determine neither admission criteria nor set academic standards. These are done by admissions officers, administrators, faculty committees, and state higher education executive offices. Once these standards are set, however, it is the job of developmental educators to insure that students meet them."

Developmental education programs permit professors teaching college-level courses to maintain high academic standards since students can develop the requisite skills needed in a separate developmental course or an adjunct academic support activity that is paired with the college-level course. Without such learning services colleges would admit the same students, and professors would be forced to teach classes with a much wider range of abilities represented but without any resources for students needing extra help. This in turn would lower the quality of education offered to the entire student body.

Another false belief that supports the elimination of developmental education from four-year colleges is that raising admission standards for these institutions will eliminate the need for academic assistance and developmental studies. On the contrary, as entrance standards

are raised, it is not unusual for faculty expectation levels to rise even more quickly. Recently when entrance standards were raised for the California State University system, the mathematics department on one campus raised their required pass rate for the departmental screening test even higher. More students were placed into the developmental courses *AFTER* the increased entrance standards than before.

Academic assistance and developmental courses have always been offered at American colleges for the past 100 years. In addition, academic assistance centers are generally designed to help all students, regardless of their previous academic performance levels, to improve their learning mastery and grades in present courses.

Some college administrators and professors advocate the false belief that developmental education and academic support programs cost too much and places a drain upon scarce dollars for hiring of nationally-known faculty members and to conduct cutting-edge research projects at the senior level institutions. Good academic support and developmental education programs promote higher reenrollment and retention rates for students. For example, data studies at the University of Missouri-Kansas City suggest that for every dollar invested in the Supplemental Instruction (SI) program, the institution receives between $1.5 and $2 due to a higher rate of reenrollment on the part of SI participants. Often learning centers should be center pieces for effective campus-wide student retention programs.

Some college administrators hold to a false belief that with the temporary rise in the total number of high school graduates, developmental students are not a high priority for recruitment and retention anymore for more selective institutions. The increase in high school graduates is temporary. Some college administrators want to recruit the higher number of average and above average high school graduates who are being produced by a temporary increase in the number of high school graduates. These administrators reason that they can theoretically recruit the average and above students and eliminate the need to deal with developmental level students. National reports from various sources agree that one-third to one-half of all first-time, full-time first year students need developmental courses in reading, writing and/or math. What institution can afford to send away or attempt to replace one-third of its entering class?

4. Some people argue that community colleges are better suited to offer developmental education than four-year institutions. What is your opinion?

This false belief is encased within an apparent compliment to the two-year colleges. This misleading statement says that it is more appropriate, cost-effective, and efficient if all developmental course work is conducted at the two-year college level rather than at the four-year institutions. While a nice theoretical concept for state legislators who are seeking to maximize a considerable investment with postsecondary education institutions, most students cannot afford to move or commute long distances to community colleges for the

needed course work. The nontraditional student of five to ten years ago IS the traditional student of today. At UMKC the "average" student is 29 years old, has one or more dependents, enrolls in nine credit hours, and works between half to full-time. These students cannot move across the state or spend hours in commuting to two-year colleges for the necessary developmental education course work.

5. If you had total control and unlimited resources, describe the components of your ideal academic support program.

There is a major paradigm shift occurring in higher education. After a long period of time of focusing on teaching, there is a healthy shift to focusing on learning. While the instructional paradigm often focuses on increasing the quantity of information, the learning paradigm focuses on the efficiency and effectiveness of the learning process regarding what does the students know and what can they do with the new information. Many classroom professors are searching for effective ways to change from a transmission mode of instruction to a focus on improving the learning and mastery of content material by students. This represents a change from being teacher-centered to learning-centered. Another trend impacting upon higher education is a change in the focus of student academic support and enrichment. In the past some institutions focused their attention by serving only students at the far extremes, developmental students and honors students. I think that the new trend will be to serve all students at the institution regarding academic excellence and persistence toward achievement of their academic degrees.

Most writers agree that the majority of faculty members want to improve the learning environment. They have tremendous content knowledge. However, we as learning assistance professionals possess some of the knowledge and skill that would be helpful to faculty members as they seek to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the learning process. There are no better experts in the learning process than those who are in our profession. Many developmental educators possess knowledge and skills in one or more of the following areas: peer collaborative learning, informal classroom assessment techniques, new paradigms of student learning pedagogy, instructional technology, affective domain needs of students, curriculum development, peer reviews of teaching activities, professional development activities, adapting instruction for diverse learning styles, and other areas.

At my institution we often consult with faculty members on improving instructional delivery, integrate emerging technology with instructional delivery systems, conduct new faculty member orientation and instructional training programs, and host faculty development programs. We have been invited by faculty members and academic departments because of the reputation we have with supporting academic development of students at all levels within the institution. Functionally we have become a teaching and learning center. This provides an excellent way to integrate ourselves more deeply into the academic community. We are all partners in the learning process.

We need to learn to reinvent ourselves as resources for the entire campus -- students and faculty alike -- in renewing the learning environment. Our institutions need for our centers and departments to expand our services to include academic enrichment for all students. Whatever the name for the center or department, becoming a more comprehensive learning center in service is the bright future for our profession.